

Board approves design guidelines for Germantown

County expects interactive document to be online by fall

by Meghan Tierney | Staff Writer

http://www.gazette.net/stories/06162010/germnew175030_32552.php

Future development in Germantown will be directed by comprehensive design guidelines on everything from street lighting to stormwater runoff.

The Germantown Employment Corridor Sector Plan, adopted by the County Council in September 2009, is the first master plan in the county to be accompanied by a standalone set of design guidelines. The nonbinding guidelines will help carry out recommendations in the plan, a document guiding the community's development over several decades, by providing examples and suggestions.

The county's Planning Board approved the draft guidelines, pending final edits, by a 3-0 vote June 3. Commissioners Norman Dreyfuss and Amy Presley were absent.

"[The guidelines] are not designed to keep the worst thing you can imagine from happening — that's what the zoning code does, basically. They're designed to try to spark thinking," board Chairman Royce Hanson said.

"We're looking at this as being a practical document that can actively be used and serves as a bridge between the master plan and the zoning ordinance and the applications that come through the door."

The County Council approved the sector plan's sectional map amendment, which puts in place zoning changes, on May 18. The plan envisions Germantown's underdeveloped business corridor as an urban, mixed-use community organized around mass transit.

Drawings that illustrate how Germantown might be developed were removed from the guidelines, for fear they would be interpreted as mandates for where roads and buildings should go, according to urban design planner Karen Kumm. Minor revisions were made for clarity and to ensure the guidelines agreed with the sector plan and the county zoning ordinance.

Four residents said at the meeting that removing the drawings and condensing some text made the guidelines harder to understand.

"It's been concentrated and yet diluted in the fact that it's down to words that you can read in practically any document. It's not specific," said Kathie Hulley of Clarksburg, who was part of a community advisory committee that helped draft the sector plan.

"People are put off by the fact that they have to go to multiple documents."

Planning staff will work with residents to clarify the guidelines before the final document is published, Kumm said. The staff is also creating an interactive, web-based version of the guidelines, expected to be complete by fall, she said.

"We're trying to go into the 21st century," Kumm said in an interview. "Instead of getting a document, you can actually click on your property and it'll take you to all the information you need."